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OO RUEHG1 RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #1554/01 2791307

ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 061307Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8708
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHMFIS/CJTF HOA IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 001554

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, AND AF/SE
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: SPLM TELLS S/E NATSIOS NCP IMMUNE TO PRESSURE, IN
FIRM CONTROL

REF: KHARTOUM 01479

Summary

1.. (SBU) Immune to pressure from the international community, the National Congress Party (NCP) remains in firm control of Sudan, is not interested in resolving the Darfur conflict prior to elections, and is stalling implementation of the CPA, five senior leaders of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) told S/E Natsios in Khartoum. They said that the NCP is operating from a position of relative strength with no widespread violence outside Darfur and has launched an offensive against the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). In the absence of a holistic, consistent, and coordinated international strategy for the transformation of Sudan, the SPLM will concentrate on building the party and military. S/E Natsios noted recent international efforts to re-focus attention on the CPA and provide incentives for the NCP's cooperation. While characterizing the NCP as unstable, CDA Fernandez said that any improvement in U.S.-Sudan relations could only be tied to concrete steps and that the U.S. maintained the ability to exert pressure on the regime. End summary.

NCP "Immune" to Western Pressure

¶2. (SBU) In an October 3 meeting with S/E Natsios, Minister of Cabinet Affairs Deng Alor, Minister of Humanitarian Affairs Kosti Manibe, Minister of Transport, Roads, and Bridges Kuol Maniang Jak, SPLM Deputy Secretary General for the Northern Sector Yassir Arman, and Blue Nile State Governor Malik Agar said that the NCP is now immune to pressure from the international community. The regime remains in firm control of Sudan, is not interested in resolving the Darfur conflict prior to elections in 2009, and is stalling implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). "We have reached a point where we have to make some tough decisions," said Alor on the eve of an SPLM Politburo meeting in Juba scheduled to begin October 4. He added that the SPLM needs to consider what pressure it could bring to bear on the regime. Arman noted the lack of a "holistic, coordinated approach (by the international community) to bring an endgame to the transformation of Sudan."

CPA Caused Crack but Regime Remains Strong

¶ 13. (SBU) Playing the "devil's advocate," Arman argued that the NCP was in a better position than before signing the CPA because of the absence of fighting in Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, and Eastern Sudan. He said that it is important to "take the NCP as they are, without exaggerating their strengths or weaknesses." While the CPA had made a crack in the essentially totalitarian nature of the regime, the NCP is benefiting from an internal situation where no alternative to its rule existed. Oil is flowing northward, the NCP maintains "strategic pockets" in Southern Sudan, and Khartoum is "making a full offensive against the CPA," said Arman. As examples of the NCP's bold action, he cited the break-down of the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC), the slow pace of civil service integration, and the NCP's refusal to allow First Vice President Kiir to reshuffle the cabinet ministers in posts designated to the SPLM (reftel). "These are not indications of weaknesses," said Arman. "To me, these are indications of strength."

Strategy to Break Sanctions

¶ 14. (SBU) Maniang said the NCP strategy to break free of sanctions had been to turn East to China, Malaysia and other Asian countries for economic access and then to show the West that it is missing important commercial opportunities in Sudan. President Omar Al Bashir's recent trip to Rome, "the center of Christendom," was the opening salvo of this conscious strategy--an attempt to create a domino effect by luring Italian, and then more European, investment to Sudan. "If the Italians come, that will be a dismantling of the

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sanctions," said Maniang, who claimed that NCP officials had described this tactic to him when he was previously scheduled to accompany Bashir. The SPLM had attempted to cooperate with the NCP in the last few months, explained Maniang, but the regime had exploited it. Concurring with Alor, Maniang said that the SPLM Politburo would now discuss how the party could go on the "offensive."

International Pressure Inconsistent

¶ 15. (SBU) Inconsistent relations between the international community, including the U.S., and Khartoum exacerbated the problem, complained Agar. "During the war in the South, the international community came up with carrots and sticks," he said. "That stick never falls on any heads and then it turns into a carrot. And then, when it's frustrated again, it goes back into a stick. You never know what it really is." Khartoum was "not interested" in resolving the Darfur conflict or implementing the CPA because it knew the international community would "never tighten the bolt." "We thought the bolt had tightened," said Agar, alluding to U.S. sanctions in May, "but now the international community already changed its tune."

¶ 16. (SBU) Arman emphasized that the NCP was "not stupid" and closely followed international events, such as the war in Iraq, the looming conflict between the West and Iran, and the 2006 Israeli war against Hezbollah as "part of the equation"--all of which they believed had seriously weakened the U.S. If the NCP was panicking, it would strive for good relations with the SPLM and the U.S., but "I don't believe this is the situation," said Arman. The SPLM's response would be to build the party and the military, regardless of the international community's actions. He urged the U.S. to keep one eye on Darfur and one eye on the CPA because they were intrinsically linked. "There will be no election without Darfur," said Arman.

West Re-Focusing on CPA...

¶7. (SBU) S/E Natsios explained that the international community is broadening its focus from Darfur to Southern Sudan, and, during a ministerial-level meeting in New York on September 21, "the Western democracies had set up a process to mobilize on the CPA." He characterized the NCP as "losing control," saying that on his recent trip to Darfur he had seen that Khartoum's support among its core "constituents," such as the Northern Rizeigat, had eroded. The Misseriya had begun to fight the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and nations such as China and Saudi Arabia were ambivalent and pressing Sudan to fulfill its international commitments. As the NCP's position weakened, it had become a "bully," said S/E Natsios, remarking that weaker governments tended to become more aggressive. He maintained that while the NCP did want to hold elections and "win," it was limiting implementation of the CPA "to make its election strategy easier."

...And Willing to Provide Incentives

¶8. (SBU) The NCP sought an improved relationship with the U.S., said S/E Natsios, and after using pressure to achieve the USG's aims on Darfur, the U.S. was prepared to provide incentives for NCP cooperation on CPA implementation. The U.S. remains skeptical about the NCP's intentions, and he admitted that such incentives could fall on deaf ears among the regime's hard-liners. The NCP had "seriously" miscalculated in believing that outreach to Italy would change its international standing, noting that Italy had no influence on Sudan policy or sanctions. CDA Fernandez said that while the U.S. had told the NCP that the possibility of improved relations existed, it was tied to concrete issues such as a resolution to the Abyei dispute and the rapid and full deployment of the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). He underscored that despite U.S. obligations in other parts of the world, the USG could take actions to chasten the Sudanese Government. He encouraged the SPLM to forge greater party unity, political and military discipline and alliances with like-minded groups outside of Southern Sudan.

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Comment

¶9. (SBU) The grim tone and defiance of these senior SPLM leaders underscores the mood of the movement's leadership in the run-up to the SPLM Politburo meeting in Juba. They are deeply concerned that the CPA, the cornerstone of a transformed and better Sudan, has succumbed to the NCP's favorite political game: the triumph of form and "process" over substance and reality. Dismissive of some very real progress in CPA implementation, the SPLM's fears about the future now outweigh their hopes about the CPA. End comment.

¶10. (U) S/E Natsios cleared this message.
FERNANDEZ